



Milkweed Planting and Care

Species	Planting Tips	How it spreads
Common Milkweed (Asclepias syriaca)	30-100% sun. Grows well in open areas or tree lines. Moist or dry soils. Height: 3-5'	Primarily spreads by rhizomes. Seed germination is low. To transplant, dig a hole at least 8" around, getting the lateral rhizome. Soak plant in water for ~2 days, then plant or plant immediately. Keep soil saturated for 4-5 days. The plant will go into shock but should regrow.
Swamp Milkweed (Asclepias incarnata)	Full sun. Grows well in typical gardens. Also good in moist areas. Height: 4'	Spreads by seeds.
Butterflyweed (Asclepias tuberosa)	Best in full sun but withstands shade for part of the day. Prefers drier soils. Height: 1-2'	Spreads by seeds.

The plants described above are native perennials that return each year. They are deer resistant although deer may nibble young plants. Common milkweed can be cut in early summer to encourage regrowth but only do so after checking for Monarch eggs and caterpillars.

Seed collection: Collect pods in fall. Pods should split open when gently squeezed and seeds will be brown. Hold pod over a paper bag and separate the seeds from the fluff without creating fluff. With very ripe pods, put the fluff with seeds in a paper bag and shake vigorously to separate seeds. Cut small hole on bottom corner of bag to shake seeds out. More techniques can be found online. Seeds require cold stratification to germinate.

What's on my milkweed? A number of insects live in on milkweed. We are asked most often about aphids and Milkweed Tussock Moth Caterpillars:

Oleander Aphids: Oleander Aphids feed on the fluid of the milkweed plant. They typically do not disturb Monarch caterpillars or eggs. They do secrete a honey dew that can make milkweed look black. What to do?

- **#1 method -- Let nature work it out:** When aphid levels build up, they will attract lady bugs and lacewings which will lay eggs on milkweed. Their larva will eat the aphids. *Should you buy lady bugs?* No. Not only are these lady bugs not native to the US, but they also fly away when you release them. The best course is to allow your local lady bugs and lacewings to move in and restore the balance.
- **Squish them:** After thoroughly checking stems/leaves for Monarch eggs and first instars, run your finger along and squish them.
- **Spray them off:** After checking for Monarch eggs/caterpillars (e.g., 1st instars), spray a steady stream of water to hose them off. You may also destroy ladybug & lacewing eggs/larva in the process.

Milkweed Tussock Moth Caterpillars: These can eat a Common Milkweed plant quickly. In a large milkweed patch this is not noticeable. If you only have 1-2 plants, you may want to move these caterpillars to a larger patch but generally they can also be left alone. These are native caterpillars and are part of a healthy ecosystem.